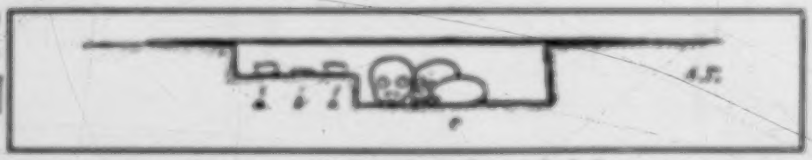

Fig. 53. Underground Chamber of a Mekuk Sorcerer. Cross-section.
(a) Circle made of plantain pieces, (b) magic medicines, (c) skulls of murdered relatives.

the Mekuk man's house companions in their sleep, so that they wake up the next day completely beaten up. They are also supposed to steal money and goods in order to take them to the Mekuk man. In short, the Mekuk stories remind one of the experiences of the man who wanted to learn to be afraid /Ed., in one of Grimm's fairy tales/.

Other medicines for wealth that utilize the power of the souls are more innocent; they do not require the murder of relatives nor care of the skulls. Instead, their powers are derived from the habitation of the souls, the Copaifera tessmannii Harms (oyom). The Mekuk skulls must be included only in the event the medicine man already possesses some. The procedure as a rule is as follows. The father of the person concerned goes with a medicine man, /152/ and both clear an area under a large Copaifera. Then a leaf vessel filled with water is set up, and into this some of the bark of the Copaifera is scraped nine times (three times three); furthermore a stone from the stomach of the crocodile is placed in it if one is available. A peculiar test of the worthiness of the young man is now given. Various objects are placed together in three piles: on the first are placed steamed cassava (women's food) and a basket (ebi dé) carried only by old women because it has a small capacity; on the second, a rifle, a bundle of vegetables (ngon) with fish, brass ornaments, cowrie shells, and a piece of cloth, all of which are things that delight young people; on the third pile is placed a fly swatter (implement of the chiefs), a foot ring made of ivory, and a boiled chicken, in other words, such things as are allowed to chiefs. Now the young man is brought to the piles. "If he has sense," he will go to the last pile and consume the chicken. In this

6; Alexandre and Binet--73 G-5 (1946-1954) 1958 F169 Fang F169

had not done so, the clan chose its chief, and the neighboring populations each sent him a spear in token of recognition.

The power of the Fong chief is on an even more personal level. The chief conveys his commands by means of an enormous drum; his pipe is preserved like a relic; his musicians play special instruments, among them the okeñ (percussion double bell), quite rare in that region but a classical instrument in the western Cameroons with the Bamiléké or Bamoum /Mum/. The chief's installation is marked by the tradition of the spears and the donning of a headpiece of parrot plumes. (J.B.)

Any more extensive authority was founded on personal prestige, which always aroused resentment. Authority was never conferred except temporarily, and it was quite often withdrawn from the holder before term.

French, German, and Spanish administrations have attempted to set up a hierarchical system of authority that it has never been possible really to impose upon the country. The three administrations all made the initial mistake of trying to establish this authority on a territorial basis, which is completely—or nearly—foreign to these nomadic people. Only village chiefship had some resemblance to a customary institution, provided that the choice of chief fell upon a nöbi mör, a genuine senior, and that his brothers accepted his authority. Canton and higher chiefdoms had no cohesion except insofar as the incumbent had authority or administrative support. At the beginning of the colonial period, however, these functions were very often entrusted to genuine be'öö mör, /82/ well-known war chiefs, high initiates of societies like the ngil, or celebrated magicians. Later on, it became more difficult to find, even among opposition ranks, chiefs possessed of real authority. After 1945 there was an attempt in the Cameroons to reorganize the system of authority on a clan basis (the Bourdier-Grenier reform), then on village lines (the Chrétol system), finally ending up with a municipal type of system.

The group displays powerful shoulder girth, rather well-developed calf, pronounced arch, ungual phalanges that cannot be pulled back.

The explorers of the last century were one and all struck by the difference in physical appearance between the Pahouin and their neighbors, much less evident today, particularly to a European (the Pahouin themselves often recognize a stranger from quite a distance). It is possible that at the time of conquest the Pahouin may have had a heavier meat diet than did the coastal populations or do their present-day descendants: the hippopotamus has been exterminated, and the rest of the wild fauna has been greatly reduced, while even animal breeding and rearing is on the decline.

b. Clothing, Ornaments, Body Marks

The traditional clothing as described by explorers hardly exists any more. One sometimes meets in remote villages the beaten fig-bark breechcloth, ébôm, and the monkeyskin hat-wig, atâ'ôsô, which was the men's everyday dress, with a wide belt of antelope skin, esas, holding a sort of spatran as well as a saber sheath. Battle dress and full dress have become very rare; they included, in addition to a red-dyed ébôm, a tailpiece /ɛ́ɛ́sɔ́/ of tiger-cat skin or of drill or any animal with bright fur, fringed leggings of the same fur, and a sort of cloak made of leopard or gorilla skin with the head sometimes forming a hood; there was a headdress of beads hanging down to the shoulders or arranged in the hair, with a tuft of touraco or juggler-eagle /ɛ́ɛ́lɛ́ bɔ́ɔ́lɔ́ɔ́/ feathers. Weapons consisted of the saber, fo, the dagger, eyem —both double bladed, the spear, akôñ, or rifle, ngal (the crossbow, mfeo, was more a hunting weapon, and the bow, ngale, a toy). Defensive armor included an oblong shield, ngo or ɗadeñ, of plaited lianas or of leather, sometimes made of an elephant ear. Even today men do not like to leave home without a weapon, at least in the villages; formerly, they were always armed. Men's jewelry comprised copper bracelets and teeth necklaces—of either animal's or man's teeth—chains of copper, iron, ivory, or elephant hair. Protective "medicaments" mebiaŋ, were usually carried in an antelope horn (Cephalophus sylvicultrix), ala' zip, hung around the neck or wrist on a strip of leather or snakeskin—a practice that still survives. The ceremonial costumes for the different rites /Bɛ/ included masks, manikins of dried grass, beads, or cowries.